

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2033

S E C R E T ADDIS ABABA 14076

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, ET

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR ASYLUM BY AFEWORK TEKLE

REF: 2 FAM 228

1. AFEWORK TEKLE, ETHIOPIA'S AND POSSIBLY AFRICA'S BEST-KNOWN ARTIST, CALLED ON ME THIS MORNING TO REQUEST ASYLUM. HE SAID THAT HE HAS NOT BEEN THREATENED IN ANY WAY BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS BUT THAT THE EXECUTIONS OF LAST SATURDAY NIGHT HAVE LED HIM TO FEAR THAT HE MIGHT BE INCLUDED IN FUTURE SEIZURES OF HOSTAGES BY THOSE IN POWER. HE EMPHASIZED THAT HE HAS NEVER PARTICIPATED IN POLITICS BUT THAT HIS NATIONAL PROMINENCE AND WELL KNOWN FAVOR WITH THE FORMER EMPEROR MAKE HIM A NATURAL TARGET FOR THOSE WHO NOW WISH TO ELIMINATE ALL PREVIOUSLY PROMINENT ETHIOPIANS.

2. AFEWORK SAID THAT "IDEALLY" HE WOULD LIKE (1) TO REMAIN IN THE EMBASSY COMPOUND UNTIL HE LEAVES THE COUNTRY; (2) TO BE TAKEN SECRETLY OUT OF THE COUNTRY IN A US MILITARY PLANE; AND (3) TO BE GIVEN IMMIGRATION STATUS IN THE US, WHERE HE WOULD NOW LIKE TO BECOME A CITIZEN AND MAKE HIS HOME. HE SAID THAT HE CANNOT WORK UNDER CONDITIONS OF STRAIN AND ANXIETY AND THAT IT WOULD THEREFORE BE BETTER FOR ART AND FOR AFRICA AS WELL AS FOR HIMSELF IF HE SHOULD LEAVE THE COUNTRY.

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3. I TOLD AFEWORK THAT IT WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE FOR

HIM TO STAY ON THE EMBASSY COMPOUND AND THAT I SAW NO WAY HE COULD LEAVE THE COUNTRY UNLESS HE APPLIED FOR AND OBTAINED AN ETHIOPIAN EXIT PERMIT. HE SAID THERE IS SOME POSSIBILITY THAT HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO OBTAIN AN EXIT PERMIT TO VISIT LAGOS AS A JUDGE FOR A CULTURAL EXHIBIT THERE IN JANUARY, BUT THAT HE IS ANXIOUS TO LEAVE MUCH SOONER THAN THAT.

4. AS FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF OBTAINING AN IMMIGRATION VISA, I SAID I WOULD CHECK WITH WASHINGTON. AFEWORK MENTIONED THAT HE A VERY WELL KNOWN IN THE US, THAT MANY OF HIS PAINTINGS HAVE BEEN BOUGHT BY AMERICANS, AND THAT A UNIVERSITY HAS OFFERED HIM A POSITION AS ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE.

5. I TOLD AFEWORK HE COULD CONTACT ME AT NOON ON NOVEMBER 29 TO SEE IF I HAVE ANY NEWS FOR HIM, AND THAT HE SHOULD MEANWHILE NOT MENTION OUR CONVERSATION TO ANYONE.

6. WITH REGARD TO 2 FAM 228, THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PRESENTLY AVAILABLE. AFEWORK IS AN UNMARRIED ETHIOPIAN BORN OCTOBER 22, 1932 IN ANKOBER IN THE SHOAN PROVINCE OF ETHIOPIA. IT SEEMS MOST UNLIKELY THAT ANY ETHIOPIAN AUTHORITIES ARE AS YET AWARE OF HIS SEEKING ASYLUM. WE KNOW OF NO CRIMINAL CHARGES MADE OR PENDING AGAINST HIM. HE IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH A POLITICAL PARTY AND HAS NOT HELD GOVERNMENT OFFICE IN THE PAST.

7. COMMENT. WE BELIEVE THERE WOULD BE LITTLE ADVERSE EFFECT ON US-ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS OF AFEWORK TEKLE WERE GRANTED AN IMMIGRATION VISA. ANY PARTICIPATION BY THE US GOVERNMENT IN ARRANGEMENTS TO EFFECT HIS DEPARTURE FROM THE COUNTRY WOULD PROBABLY BECOME KNOWN, HOWEVER, AND WOULD BE DEEPLY RESENTED BY THE PRESENT MILITARY LEADERSHIP. WE BELIEVE IT WOULD BE IN THE US INTEREST TO INFORM AFEWORK TEKLE THAT HE WILL BE GRANTED AN IMMIGRATION VISA AT ANY US CONSULAR OFFICE IF HE SUCCEEDS BY HIS OWN EFFORTS IN LEAVING THE COUNTRY, BUT THAT WE CANNOT HELP HIM TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY.

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